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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how technology, enhanced by the experience and supportive presence of the teacher, can be used toward teaching French civilization within its context. Information is being provided on the philosophical inspiration, and the format, textbooks, basic hardware, software, special programs, services, and materials recommended for French civilization courses. The focus of this paper is on organizational strategies, topical files, timing for maximum input, pre- and post-viewing or listening treatment of materials. A few examples give details on the use of technology in the teaching of specific topics. The conclusion contains a list of benefits, limitations, and recommendations with regard to such technology-aided cultural teaching/learning projects. (Author)

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TOWARDS TEACHING FRENCH CIVILIZATION IN CONTEXT: A TECHNOLOGY-AIDED APPROACH[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how technology, enhanced by the experience and supportive presence of the teacher, can be used toward a teaching of French civilization within its context. Information is being provided on the philosophical inspiration, and the format, text books, basic hardware, software, special programs, services, and materials recommended for French civilization courses. The focus of the paper is on organizational strategies, topical files, timing for maximum input, pre-and post-viewing or listening treatment of materials. A few examples give details on the uses of technology in the teaching of specific topics. The conclusion contains a list of benefits, limitations, and recommendations with regard to such technology-aided cultural teaching/learning projects.

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

The steady progress of technology within the last few decades has encouraged new approaches to the teaching of foreign languages, cultures and civilizations. This paper intends to demonstrate how various forms of technology can be used to maximize the effectiveness and authenticity of the teaching-learning experience in the study of French civilization and modern France.

Philosophical inspiration

The approach used in this study is based on a conception of the teaching/learning process that combines not only the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing of a language but integrates them within an environment that is as close as possible to an authentic, real-life situation. It comprises aspects of the four F's of culture with a small "c," foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts, in addition to those of Culture with a big "C," literary classics and works of art, and what is usually referred to as "civilization," such as geophysics, history, politics, economics, leisure, sports and daily life (Kramsch 1991). The goal is (1) to reduce to a minimum teacher or textbook discourse ABOUT language, grammar, culture and civilization, which is necessarily subjective and often dogmatic, and (2) to encourage a first-hand acquisition of skills and knowledge that is less mediated and therefore more authentic. Furthermore, this integrative approach does not separate one aspect of a foreign culture or civilization from another, such as language from literature (Swaffar 1990) or science from history, but regards them as integral and interrelated parts of a national entity, a human society that is alive and changing but also typical and different from our own.

Unlike the recommendations of certain Foreign Language Commissions, such as The President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies in 1979 (Weidmann Koop 1991, Perkins 1980),[1] which tend to stress pragmatic, national security, vocational and career interests in foreign language and civilization studies, the focus in these courses is on

[1] This is a revised and considerably expanded version of a conference presentation, entitled "Minimize Subjective Theory and Maximize Authentic Experience in the Teaching of French Civilization," available from ERIC.

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human values, understanding, and ethics. This is necessarily accompanied by the development of practical skills and meaningful communication in all "real-life" situations. In the past, stress on one aspect of linguistic or cultural studies over another, dictated by changing political and ideological factors, has arbitrarily eliminated many of the inherent benefits of civilization studies. Such dictates have led to ignorance and misconceptions not only about other nations but about the seriousness and fundamental value of humanistic studies in general.

The broad, contextual approach suggested here has probably motivated teachers and students since the Renaissance and never quite disappeared in Europe. Today, its realization is still only in progress. In the course of the last decade, though, it has taken a huge step forward with the steady development of technology, particularly in the area of global communication. As an ideal, it has served as the inspirational basis for the technology-aided civilization courses outlined in this study.

Format of civilization courses

In order to provide a solid historical survey of French culture and civilization, the subject matter is divided into two semesters, two chronologically unequal sequences, of which the first addresses the development of French civilization from its origins to the end of the Second World War, and the second, the most significant aspects of contemporary France. The courses described here are geared toward the most advanced level of undergraduate education, usually in the fourth year of study, when students have already acquired a certain proficiency (some are native speakers) of the language and are able to read and understand French quite readily. Usually, the linguistic challenge in these courses consists of getting rid of some lingering, often ingrained, problems with pronunciation, grammar and even vocabulary.

Teachers meet their students three times a week for fifty minutes in class, not much more. As a follow-up to the previously assigned readings or other research for the day, class time is used for student presentations, brief lectures (kept to a minimum), and general discussions of three to four related topics, for instance the painting, sculpture, architecture and music of a particular historical period.

Brief examinations are scheduled throughout the semester after each major segment of the course such as a century or the geography or educational system of contemporary France. Typically, tests consist of three parts: (1) brief oral responses (recorded on cassette) to about 7 questions of identification, (2) a few descriptive and/or explanatory paragraphs in response to precise questions concerning the subject matter of the course, and (3) an essay that requires, in addition to the acquired knowledge, faculties of synthesis, comparison, personal judgement and individual taste. Both form and content of the responses are taken into consideration in grading. Round tables with individual presentations (sometimes video-taped), and written exercises, similar to but more comprehensive than the previous tests, are used as final oral and written examinations. The program is supplemented by occasional visits to museums, lectures by visiting scholars or politicians, and the attendance of summer programs or guided study tours abroad.

Text books

For nearly two decades, *Les Grandes étapes de la civilisation française* by Jean Thoraval (Bordas 1976) has been used as the most adequate text on the Euro-American market for a thorough study of the development of French civilization from its origins to the twentieth century. In 1991, Bordas came out with a new version, which surprisingly bore the same title but named a different author, Ghislaine Cotentin-Rey, and appeared under the auspices of the French Ministry of Culture. Unfortunately, this new version of 1991 falls short on illustrations and quotations from original sources, which precisely constituted the strength of the previous one. It also contains far less historical information. Such shortcomings make it necessary to supplement the text by occasional lectures, course notes, and excerpts from other publications, for instance Palmer's *Le Passé vivant de la France* (1983) and *De la Révolution à nos jours* (1983), Mauchamp's *La France de toujours* (1987), or Coulanges and Daniel's *Un coup d'oeil sur la France* (1991).

The excellent text by Guy Michaud and Alain Kimmel, *Le Nouveau* Guide France, first published by Hachette in 1964, and of which the most recent of many updated editions appeared, enhanced by color, in 1991, constitutes a strong backbone to the study of the major aspects of contemporary France, including its geography, history, system of government, education, economy and culture. It is *the* text students tend to keep even after graduation and for their travels to France. Since it is very schematic and concise, it, too, needs to be supplemented by literary texts, articles and excerpts from publications such as Gérard Mermet's *Francoscopie* (1989), Simone Oudot and David L. Gobert's *La France: Culture, économie, commerce* (1984), M. Paoletti and R. Steele's *Civilisation française quotidienne* (1984), and journals, magazines or newspapers such as *Le Monde, Figaro, Le'Express*, and *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

At the heart of this study, is a carefully created technological environment that makes available some of the most sophisticated learning and administrative tools. Following is a list of its necessary components.

The available basic hardware should include:

- a powerful satellite earth station with a large (preferably 12-meter) dish that allows for the reception of regular television broadcasts from France (and many other countries around the globe) directly at faculty offices and individual classrooms

- an institution-wide central main frame that provides access to a multiplicity of computer systems and services

- IBM-compatible personal computers in each faculty office and student dormitory that are hooked up to the institutional main frame and to dot matrix and laser printers

- video cassette recorders and television monitors in each faculty office for ready convenience in previewing video recordings and develop questionnaires and exercises before their use in class or in the laboratory

- multi-standard video cassette recorders in each "designated" classroom that allow projection of video recordings of cultural, historical, political and geographical programs collected abroad irrespective of their specific technological systems such as PAL, SECAM or NTSC

- high-tech electronic classrooms and language laboratories that are available for testing and interactive video viewing and exercises

The following software, special programs, services and materials have proven to be among the most helpful:

- WordPerfect 5.1 provides one of the most convenient word processing, editing and desk-top publishing programs. Questionnaires, exams and exercises can easily be composed, revised and stored for later use. Periodic updating of course materials is greatly facilitated.

- CALIS, developed by Duke University, is a program used for grammar drills and text treatment.

- VERBAPUCE produced by the Universiteit Antwerpen, provides for drills of irregular verbs.

- Administrative tasks such as accountability, office and student records, and validation procedures can be handled through the central time-sharing system of the institution.

- The electronic mail system allows for rapid communication with anyone across campus or at other institutions. Examination questions can be sent directly to individual students or a whole class and their answers received back instantaneously.

- Telephone tie lines to major cities in the area connect with libraries and bookstores. Conference calls and impending voice/vision communication brings students ever closer to their counterparts across the oceans.

- FAX machines access the whole world and are invaluable for beating deadlines in signing up for competitive cultural events and conferences, sending in term papers minutes before they are due, or for ordering books or papers.

- XEROX machines copy, reduce, magnify and produce black and white or even color transparencies for overhead projection in the classroom or at conference presentations.

- The Educational Resources Center lends out slide and movie projectors and tape decks. It also assists in the production of video recordings of interviews, round tables or plays.

- A carefully selected collection of video recordings includes cultural, historical, political, and geographic programs such as *Les Châteaux de la Loire*, *Le Mont Saint-Michel*, *Le Louvre*, *Versailles*, *Carmen*, *Phèdre*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *The Trials of Charles de Gaulle*, and *The Battle of Algiers*.

- Audio cassette collections should comprise the speeches of de Gaulle, Léon Blum, the presidents and prime ministers of the Fifth Republic, interviews with Jean-Paul Sartre, and musical recordings of Gregorian chants, works by Lully, Rameau, Ravel, Bizet and Boulez and *La Marseillaise*, among other things. It is rewarding to collect one's own interviews with French novelists, critics, politicians, lycée- and university students.

- Slides and still frames of art work, typical French landscapes, monuments and documents are an asset to the program.

- The Library provides access to the holdings of the Library of Congress and has available updated bibliographical CD-ROMS. Faculty are able to use their personal computers to access the card catalogue of their library and order interlibrary loans.

- Satellite transmissions from abroad, for instance the news program of France's TV5, as well as periodic special telecasts such as *France TV Magazine*, are released directly to faculty offices and classrooms.

- Compact laser disks containing French civilization programs, produced specifically for these courses in collaboration with France TV Magazine located at the University of Maryland Baltimore Campus, are invaluable teaching/learning tools. They can be used for the development of interactive video lessons which are particularly indicated for laboratory exercises and self-starters at a lower level of proficiency.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

The possible uses of technology in the teaching of foreign languages and civilizations already seem endless. Technology in itself, however, can be useful only when properly applied to the specific goals of each course or program. The judicious selection and organization of available systems and materials is thus the primordial task of effective teaching. Even in this difficult process, technology itself can help control and organize the wealth of materials it provides. Available options can be organized in files that appear at the push of the button.

Topical files

For the first sequence of the course, dealing with the historical development of French civilization, computer files containing charts, handouts, and questionnaires should be created for each century, and within each such file, subfiles, for instance, on the art, architecture, literature, history, philosophy and social life of the historical period. For the second sequence of the course, concerning modern France after 1945, files are organized by topics such as geography, industry, transportation, education, *francophonie*, the Fifth Republic, political parties, literature, and business correspondence. After faculty visits to France or attendance of professional conferences, files are likely to receive new input: maps, charts, illustrations, or recordings. It is relatively easy today, with the rapid processing of information, to create new files or to rearrange and complete old ones. Among the most important strategies of a teacher is to be ready to provide topics and situations that correspond and respond best to student needs and interests at the time the courses are taught. In recent years, ethics, war, feminism, the individual rights of human beings to live

or to die, capitalism vs. communism, and democratic vs. republican values triggered lively discussions.

Timing for maximum intellectual input

In using technology in teaching, one must take into consideration the relatively short attention span of students. Audiovisual presentations should be kept short and allow enough time for individual reactions and discussions. Segments should be carefully chosen for criteria such as acute interest, unusualness, humor, controversial nature, or affective appeal (Terrell 1988) in order to trigger a quick response and provoke an exchange of ideas that leads to the discovery of their relevance to the students' own lives and thinking. There should also be opportunities for total immersion into an authentic situation over an extended period of time to encourage automatic linguistic response within the target language and a "feel" for national and cultural specificity. Yet, it is recommended to monitor a lengthy viewing process, for instance with a questionnaire, not only to check the attention span but also comprehension. Without such careful planning, the use of technology in teaching can easily become counterproductive and simply add to the passive viewing and listening habits so detrimental to our modern TV generation.

Pre-or post-viewing or listening treatment of materials

In order to make the best possible use of technological means and enhance both student learning and acquisition of knowledge, selected materials must be culturally or historically integrated, questioned, discussed, compared, and used creatively. The result is a most fruitful and engaging learning process which, however, requires a continuous pre- and post-viewing and listening treatment of the materials by the instructor. In addition to the actual teaching, each year the instructor thus faces the challenge of having to establish a syllabus for a course that is not only based on the traditional textbook but also on the integration, treatment, and physical preparation of the ever changing products of technology. There is no guaranty that the technological set up will also work as planned on the day for which it has been scheduled. Instructors therefore have to be ready to substitute for technological failure in order to avoid wasting even one of the precious minutes of class time.

EXAMPLES OF TYPICAL USES OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF FRENCH CIVILIZATION

Nearly each year, a historical event or figure receives added public attention by the media, usually for reasons of an anniversary celebration. These have been excellent opportunities for collecting technological teaching materials. The years 1989, the bicentennial of the French revolution, and 1990, commemoraling the various anniversaries of de Gaulle, were particularly rewarding.

Studying a major event in the development of French civilization: the French Revolution, 1789-1989

1. Introductory exercises: integrating the event within the historical, political, economic, and cultural situation

Two 50-minute periods of the first semester are usually devoted to the study of the 1789 Revolution in France. This is preceded by a survey of the reigns of Louis XV and XVI, the eighteenth-century philosophers, the Encyclopedia, and the arts and architecture reflecting the spirit of the historical moment. As homework, students are required to read the assigned pages in the detailed French Civilization textbook with all the pertinent quotations, from the warnings of Turgot, the oath of the *Etats Généraux*, to the declaration of the Assembly that the homeland was in danger.

2. Class activities: identification of historical sites, characterization of figure heads, comparison of customs, interpretation of symbols, analysis of political events

Detailed maps of Paris and France are used to identify the location of Versailles, the *Jeu de Paume*, the Bastille, and the Tuileries. Slides contain paintings and engravings of historical events and of revolutionary figure heads such as Danton and Robespierre. Segments of the film, *La Nuit de Varenne*, feature the aristocracy and how they dressed, spoke, and what they valued. Comparisons can be made between the costumes of the new "citizens" and the elaborate robes and wigs of the aristocrats. Jean Renoir's film, *La Marseillaise* (1938) depicts a rather voracious and benign Louis XVI at breakfast on July 14, 1789 and, in another segment, a woman making a revolutionary speech at a Jacobin club in Marseille. Ariane Mnouchkine's famous theater production, entitled *1789*, dramatizes the exploitation of the Third Estate by the two powerful ruling classes, church and nobility. While viewing a large reproduction of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" on the classroom wall, an overhead projector allows to read a few of its articles and compare them to those of the "Declaration of the Rights of Women" proposed by Olympe de Gouge. A video program shows symbols of revolutionary France, among them the most recent *Marianne*, inspired by the features of Brigitte Bardot. The class can listen to the passionate tunes of the *Marseillaise*, translate and compare its form and content to their own national hymn and, probably with enthusiasm, record their own rendering of it on cassette for a fun-filled replay. Individual students may view the film *Danton* on their own TV during its campus-wide distribution by the Educational Resources Center and debate the role of Robespierre in the years of terror and execution.

3. Contemporary relevance of the topic

The study of the years of terror may lead to a discussion of President Mitterrand's decision in 1981 to abolish the death penalty and with it the *guillotine*. This may develop into a debate concerning the right to capital punishment and the treatment of criminals and prisoners in the United States. David's painting of *Marat in his bath*, could be analyzed in relation to the violence and murder experienced by presidents and other important political figures of this country in recent history. A fragment of a telecast from the bicentennial celebration in Paris, July 14, 1989, in which Jessie Norman, draped in a large *Tricolore* and looking much like Delacroix's *Liberty leading the people*, engages in a passionate rendering of the *Marseillaise*, could prompt a

discussion on the spirit of 1789 and its significance today, two centuries later, for minorities in America.

4. Historical legacy

The regular satellite telecasts of the French news recorded directly in the classroom, in November 1989, showed the streams of East Germans trying to escape to freedom through Hungary and, on November 9, the ominous Berlin wall, scribbled with graffiti about peace, humanity, and freedom, crumbling in front of the televiewers' eyes. The segments seem to evoke the enduring spirit of one of the greatest moments in French history and civilization, as if it had manifested itself again with renewed vigor in the bicentennial year of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The impact of all these technological means of information on 1789 and 1989 are such that students are not likely to forget the lesson.

PREPARING WITH TECHNOLOGY FOR A COURSE ON MODERN FRANCE IN THE NEXT SEMESTER: 1990, THE YEAR OF CHARLES DE GAULLE

The year 1990 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Charles de Gaulle (1890), the fiftieth of his *Résistance* speeches from London (1940), and the twentieth of his death (1970). There are numerous audio-visual products available for a discussion of de Gaulle's role in the First World War (his capture by the Germans in the battle of Verdun), the *Résistance*, the liberation of Algeria, the constitution of the Fifth Republic, his dilemma after 1968, and finally his legacy to the governments that followed. A quick computer search of the bibliography of the MLA and the catalog of the Library of Congress reveals the most recent studies on de Gaulle that may be of interest to undergraduate students. De Gaulle's speeches from London are available on cassette, in particular the famous one of June 8, 1940. There are also interviews with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and recordings of Albert Camus and other participants in the war against Vichy and Nazi Germany. A prize-winning BBC documentary by George Vicas, entitled *The Trials of Charles de Gaulle* (1962) and a film, *The Battle of Algiers*, seem particularly suited to the discussion of the ethics of war, and more so when shown in conjunction with a French documentary on the war in the Gulf. Even from the daily satellite transmissions of the news from France, it is quite easy to record speeches and ceremonial functions of past and present presidents and prime ministers of France that followed de Gaulle in the course of the Fifth Republic.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the technology-aided civilization courses outlined here is to advance toward an ideal where the development of French civilization and the realities of modern France could be taught and learned within their authentic context. It would be presumptuous to claim total success for the project. Yet the benefits of the endeavor, it is felt, have largely outweighed the limitations and the drawbacks encountered in the process.

Among the benefits derived from technology-aided teaching are the following:

- Technology can create an environment that is the next-best thing to being not only spatially transported into another country such as France but also temporally led back centuries into the past.

- Such "technological visits" can be repeated until the language and contents of recordings are fully understood and "appropriated".

- Authentic sounds and images are brought directly into the classroom.

- Students are exposed to native discourse, at a normal speed, with regionally varying but authentic accents.

- Non-verbal communication can be observed in mannerisms, gestures, facial expressions, and the use of non-articulated sounds.

- The discourse can be analyzed for sociolinguistic purposes.

- Sociopolitical attitudes and views can be studied within a real-life situation.

- The oral and visual reinforce each other in their effect and message.

- Subjective theories and interpretations by a teacher or in a textbook can be avoided or corrected by the immediacy of the viewing/listening experience.

- Speeches and decision making processes by major political figures are there to be observed by each individual viewer without prior censure and potential bias.

- Vocabulary can be acquired with its proper pronunciation and contextual meaning and significance.

- Idiomatic phrases are understood and retained with less learning effort.

- Technology appeals to students: viewing is more popular with most students than reading. It seems to them less tedious than traditional ways of studying.

- Direct satellite telecasts of the French news are among the most popular uses of technology in class.

- On the spot documentary transmissions of sports or political events trigger the most lively response, encourage comparison, seem most relevant to students, and provide them with a feeling of being "on top of the news."

- Technology conveys a sense of freedom (Tamisier 1989) from all kinds of barriers such as time, space, governmental, parental and teacher control.

The observed limitations of technology were usually due to systemic difference and outside control:

- The consumer ideology dominates the production of most forms of technology such as video programs and films. Many researchers are stressing this problem (Daniel 1989, Debray 1989, Morin 1989, Sarde 1989).

- Videos are "produced" and their sounds and images most of the time are not renderings of authentic situations.

- Sounds and images are "framed," chosen, selected to convey a specific message. They are not there in their natural environment.

- The French government, *l'Etat*, exercises powerful control over the news and most other media.

- Technology tends to reinforce stereotypes which are readily accepted by American audiences.

- Technology, just like Culture over the centuries, tends to be elitist. It seems to follow age-old prejudices and does not seem democratic in its portrayal and treatment of women (Makward 1989) and minorities.

- Technology tends to be normative and limiting in its ways of providing information.

- Technology can be dictatorial in its choices, exclusions and simplifications (Porcher 1976).

The following recommendations are offered to help overcome existing limitations in the teaching of civilization with the help of technology:

- Collect materials that are not produced by the elite, on the elite, and for the elite.

- Use regional sources from radio, television news and cultural programs.

- Produce your own videos, slides, and interviews.

- Complete the viewing and listening experience with what you know and encourage students to do the same (activate the hermeneutic process).

- Provide pre- and post-viewing and listening exercises. Help them "read" the text of the discourse they hear (Fiske 1978).

- Ask students to identify typical signs and structures and compare them to those that fulfill equivalent roles and functions in their own environment. Practice comparative "semiotics" to enrich understanding, draw attention to characteristic detail and understand relationships.

- Warn against the traps of technology (which are similar to the well known traps of the printed word), against believing everything they see and hear.

- Encourage students to keep a critical distance, an individual and human "otherness" toward the information provided by technology.

- Technology offers enormous support in the attempt to immerse the student of French civilization in an authentic atmosphere, but it cannot do so on its own. It will always need the pedagogical and intellectual skills, the experience, and the supportive presence of the teacher and the informed interest of the student to be effective.

- Finally, in the midst of enthusiasm and optimism triggered by technology we must remember that technology can only be a surrogate, never the authentic situation or experience with its time-and space contingencies and its human complexities. Even the most recent events of modern France already belong to the past. With the proper human input, though, technology can become the "next-best thing" (Petit 1989). It can help along the way toward the ideal of an authentic, contextual teaching of French civilization and, in this capacity seems to accomplish more than any other teaching instrument available at this time. Future technology no doubt will further develop and refine this unique potential.

Endnotes

1. In the report of the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies of 1979, political and security concerns outweigh cultural and general educational ones: "Nothing less is at issue than the nation's security. At a time when the resurgent forces of nationalism and ethnic and linguistic consciousness so directly affect global realities, the US requires far more reliable capacities to communicate with its allies, analyze the behavior of potential adversaries, and earn the trust and the sympathies of the uncommitted... Our lack of language competencies diminishes our capabilities in diplomacy, in foreign trade, and in comprehension of the world in which we live and compete" (Perkins 1980).

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